

1/16/2014: Iowa men's basketball notebook



Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery discusses the 14th-ranked Hawkeyes' upcoming game against Minnesota during a press conference held Thursday, Jan. 16, 2014, at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City.

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HawkeyeDrive.com

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The glare is becoming more and more noticeable.

Ever since arriving home from defeating then-No. 3 Ohio State in Columbus this past weekend, the national spotlight has shined on the Iowa Hawkeyes as brightly as ever in Fran McCaffery's four-year tenure. It has also led to the entire national landscape – not just those following the Big Ten – to take note of what Iowa has done up to this point.

That win over the Buckeyes catapulted the Hawkeyes six spots in this week's AP poll, where they're now ranked 14th entering their next contest on Jan. 19 against Minnesota. This entire

week, Iowa has been pat on the back and talked up by folks such as *Sports Illustrated's* Seth Davis, who recently [proclaimed the Hawkeyes as his "dark horse" to reach the Final Four.](#)

"We play one game on CBS and everyone sees, obviously against a good opponent on the road, and win," junior forward Aaron White said. "You go from 'maybe' making the NCAA Tournament to now making the Final Four or possibly being a Final Four team."

"I found that funny, to be honest with you. I turned that on and chuckled to myself because now that they're telling us doesn't change my perception."

On a local level, the interest surrounding Iowa is even more sky-high. The school recently announced all seven of its remaining home games – including Sunday's game against the Golden Gophers – are now sold out.

"When I came in, we didn't have as much support in the stands as we do now," senior guard Devyn Marble said. "But that just comes with winning. When you win, people want to support you and want to see you grow as a team."

"I think the Hawkeye fans have embraced us and have really come in and supported us. We just appreciate it."

Prepping for Minnesota

When Minnesota visits Carver-Hawkeye Arena this weekend, it will be different from years past. A big part of that is Richard Pitino coming in from Florida International last spring to replace Tubby Smith as head coach. The Golden Gophers entered their contest against No. 11 Ohio State Thursday evening with a 2-2 record in Big Ten play after losing in overtime over the weekend at Michigan State.

McCaffery made note of the extreme differences between what Minnesota did under Smith and what it currently does under

Pitino when asked about it Thursday.

"They play completely differently and their style is completely different," McCaffery said. "They're going to press more, zone more, change defenses more, trap more. They're going to shoot a ton of 3s.

"They've got a real talented core of personnel. They're quick and I think they have a good blend of experience and some new guys. I think they're going to be a major factor in this league."

One type of defense Iowa should anticipate early and often from the Golden Gophers on Sunday is the 2-3 zone. Pitino told reporters during the Big Ten's coaches teleconference Monday he believed his squad plays more zone than any other team in the league.

Knowing this, 3-point shooting could play a key role for the Hawkeyes one way or the other Sunday. Against the Buckeyes, Iowa made just one of its first 10 attempts from behind the arc before hitting three straight 3-pointers that sparked their comeback win.

The first of those three made 3-pointers came from sophomore guard Mike Gesell, who downplayed the importance Iowa's perimeter shooting could have Sunday when asked about being able to combat the Golden Gophers' zone.

"We're still going to take what the defense gives us," sophomore guard Mike Gesell said. "It's not like we're going to go out there looking for 3s saying, 'Oh, we have to make this many 3s to win the game.'

"We're just going to look to continue what we've always done."

As for things on Iowa's end, McCaffery was asked Thursday whether he would consider tightening his current 11-man rotation. He said he doesn't want to tighten down to 9-10

players, but that “it’s possible.” Freshman guard Peter Jok didn’t play against Ohio State (the second game in the last three where he didn’t see any minutes) and sophomore guard Anthony Clemmons was on the bench for the entire second half.

“It’s not going to be by design,” McCaffery said. “It will be a game-by-game thing. With the way Josh played the other day, it precluded Clemmons from coming back in. That happened. But we’ll see.”

Marble’s growth

If there’s any one player who probably best exemplifies the Hawkeyes’ current resurgence, it’s Marble. Earlier in the week, the senior guard was named the Big Ten’s Player of the Week after going for 22 points against Ohio State over the weekend. Before that, he also had a 15-point, 6-assist performance in a game against Northwestern last week.

For Marble, it was his first time having the conference’s weekly honor bestowed upon him. It was also Iowa’s first Big Ten Player of the Week honor since Matt Gatens once shared the honor late in his senior year of 2011-12.

“You’re seeing a guy who is clearly very comfortable in how we use him,” McCaffery said. “He has got supreme confidence right now.

“He’s not a selfish guy, but if he needs to be the guy, he can be. I’m just excited for him in terms of how his game has really evolved.”

Through four Big Ten games, Marble is averaging the following per contest – 19.8 points, 4.3 rebounds, three assists and 2.5 steals. That versatility at both ends of the floor is what Marble believes has led to him becoming as consistent as he has been two weeks into the conference slate.

“Sometimes, I’m not shooting the ball as great. But you can’t

really tell because I'm still able to get to the basket," Marble said. "I'm still getting steals and that leads to transition opportunities that can get me going and get the team going.

"I just think I'm creating more opportunities for myself offensively and defensively and it has just been paying off."

Possible bounce back for McCabe

Senior forward Zach McCabe is coming off one of his worst shooting performances as a Hawkeye, going 0-for-8 from the floor against the Buckeyes last weekend.

When asked about McCabe's shooting woes in Columbus and whether anything is said to encourage him going forward, McCaffery pointed out his other contributions against the Buckeyes, including four rebounds and three assists, one of which was a back-door cut to junior guard Josh Oglesby.

"When they started trying to work the baseline among cutters back there, he's so experienced," McCaffery said. "He knew when to come over, he knew when to stay on the other side and was just always in the right place.

"If you're staring at the ball in the zone and guys are cutting behind you, you better know what's going on. That's why he was in there in that stretch and he made a difference defensively."

White echoed McCaffery's remarks about the other areas where he performed well against Ohio State. Senior forward Melsahn Basabe took it a step further Thursday by firing back at McCabe's critics.

"What's a bad game? If he isn't scoring, that doesn't make a bad game when there are so many other key components," Basabe said. "I've scored 20 points and had bad games because I wasn't doing a bunch of the other little stuff. Zach is always

going to play tough, rebound, defend, pass.

“If you know basketball, you know the intricacies of what’s going on. I don’t think he’s focusing on that and neither am I because he hasn’t been playing bad. Scoring is something the fans and media and everybody else pays attention to. But there are other things that he’s consistently doing exceptionally for our team.”

As for Sunday’s game against Minnesota, McCabe might prove to be one of the Hawkeyes’ biggest difference makers. In six career games against the Golden Gophers – albeit against a different coaching staff – McCabe has averaged seven points and 5.5 rebounds per game while playing an average of 21 minutes. The 6-7 forward also contributed double figures scoring in both of Iowa’s contests against Minnesota last season.

Should McCabe play against the Golden Gophers on Sunday like he previously has against them, he would be meeting his current scoring average and almost doubling his current rebounding average through 17 games this season.

“I want him to do the exact same thing the next game that he did [against Ohio State],” McCaffery said. “I think in all honesty, he may be rushing a little bit. I may talk to him about that, but I thought his shots were good.

“He’s a very effective player, even when he’s not making 3s.”

Playing again on anniversary of Street’s death

Sunday marks the 21st anniversary of former Iowa basketball player Chris Street’s death following an accident along Highway 1 outside Iowa City during his junior season. This is the second straight season the Hawkeyes are playing a home game on the date of Jan. 19 and the third time in four seasons Iowa has played on the date, period.

When Iowa played Wisconsin on the 20th anniversary of his death last year, there were numerous tributes being done in Street's honor, including the Hawkeyes having a No. 40 jersey on their bench during the game that evening. McCaffery said no such tribute was being planned by him or the team for Sunday's game, but added that everyone would be thinking of Street that afternoon.